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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINGSTON 000393

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TAGS: JM PHUM ELAB PGOV CVIS
SUBJECT: LABOR MINISTER DALLEY ON PNP SUCCESSION, LABOR
UNREST, AND CCJ

REF: A. KINGSTON 253
B. 04 KINGSTON 2898

¶1. Summary: On February 4, Poloff met with Labor Minister Horace Dalley. On the eve of the People's National Party's (PNP) vice-presidential election, Dalley expressed his concern that internal factions could pull the party into conflict. He also shared his predictions for the election results, and confirmed his continuing support for National Security Minister Peter Phillips to succeed Prime Minister PJ Patterson. Dalley discussed his shaky relations with unhappy employers and workers, and shared his thoughts on the Caribbean Court of Justice and its impact on the PNP government. End Summary.

Predictions for PNP Succession

¶2. At the PNP's annual convention on January 22nd, Paul Burke, Region Three Chairman, received a surprise (to his competitors) nomination for the vice presidency that challenged the four incumbents (Peter Phillips, Portia Simpson-Miller, Karl Blythe, and Paul Robertson), who were widely expected to be re-elected to their posts unchallenged.

The move threw the conference into disarray and resulted in the spontaneous huddling of the party leadership, followed by PM Patterson's designation of February 5 as the vice presidential election date. On the eve of the vote, Dalley explained to Poloff that he was skeptical that the event would go smoothly, citing security concerns and the risk that the competing internal factions would cause the voting to degenerate into public clashes of the sort for which the opposition Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) has become renowned in the media (see Ref A).

¶3. Dalley claimed confidence that Burke's surprise entry into the field would not win him a vice-presidential spot, but that the vote itself would reveal how much support each candidate has among the delegates, thus forecasting the upcoming party presidential elections. Dalley explained that his support is still behind Phillips (see Ref B) who, he said, expected to come in third in the February 5 voting. The Labor Minister asserted he was confident that Simpson Miller, whom he called his "second choice" for party president, would garner the most votes.

¶4. Dalley proposed two scenarios that he said might play out before the PNP calls for internal presidential elections. First, he said that Simpson-Miller could strike a deal with Finance Minister Omar Davies, a candidate for party president whose campaign has not yet gained much momentum in the public view. Dalley suggested that Davies might withdraw his candidacy and ask his delegates to support Simpson-Miller instead, boosting her campaign. Second, the labor minister said that, should crime continue unchecked in Jamaica, Phillips could be asked to leave his post as national security minister, in which case he would drop out of the race for the presidency.

Labor Unrest is Not a Threat

¶5. Turning to his issues as labor minister, Dalley stated an interest in continuing to serve in his current position. He expressed little concern over recent newspaper headlines that report Dalley to be unpopular among both labor groups (for fining a group of striking workers) and employers (for raising the minimum wage). Dalley said that he was not worried about recent calls by labor groups for his resignation, that the prime minister had assured him that such threats would not be taken seriously, and that the matter would be resolved.

¶6. Dalley expressed concern at the current state of the U.S. H-2B visa program, which has historically allowed approximately 8,000 temporary Jamaican workers per year to hold seasonal jobs in the United States, typically in the hospitality industry. Dalley explained that the enforcement of a worldwide cap on the number of visas issued annually would affect close to 3,000 Jamaican seasonal workers this year. He said that his ministry is closely following appeals

by U.S. employers to waive the cap for employees who have previously been granted H-2B visas.

Caribbean Court of Justice

17. On February 3, the U.K. Privy Council, which serves as Jamaica's highest court, ruled the government's approach to establishing the Caribbean Court of Justice unconstitutional (see Septel). Dalley denied that extensive media coverage of the issue would seriously threaten the PNP in advance of the upcoming general elections. He explained that any negative fallout from the issue was not likely to sway most voters, as the court is a problem for the "upper and middle" classes. He added that the months leading up to the general election amounted to a "political lifetime," and anything could yet happen. He went on to say that he is not worried about the Jamaica Labor Party's leading candidate to succeed Patterson, Bruce Golding. Golding, Dalley said, "owes too many favors" to the supporters who backed his ascent to party leadership, and Golding is now watched by them with such scrutiny that he is effectively "under house arrest." Dalley added that the CCJ could even reflect well on the PNP, should they be able to broker a deal with the JLP to push it through. The matter would not, Dalley said, go to a referendum. The PNP, he explained, does not have a successful referendum record, not having won one since 1962, when Jamaicans voted for their independence.

Trafficking in Persons

18. At the end of the meeting, Poloff delivered to Dalley a copy of a January 14 letter to the Ministry of National Security, informing them that the 2005 Trafficking in Persons Report would be published in June. Dally said he would raise the issue within his ministry. (Note: Dalley mentioned that his ministry was investigating some trafficking cases, but it was clear that he was referring to alien smuggling. Dalley's lack of awareness, as a cabinet minister, of TIP is likely representative of the GOJ's level of awareness on the matter in general. End Note.)

19. Comment: Dalley requested this meeting with Poloff, urging that "we must talk." However, he did not seem to have an explicit message to register with Post. As in Poloff's last meeting with Dalley on October 22, 2004, the labor minister was notably forthcoming and casual. His comments on the PNP succession continue to largely track with what we are hearing elsewhere about the PNP race, although Dalley's confidence in the candidacy of Peter Phillip now appears less resolute. In the week following the February 4 meeting, many of Dalley's assertions have been borne out: on February 5th, Phillips placed third in the party's vote, although Simpson-Miller placed second; and on February 7, PM Patterson announced that he would meet with trade unions later in the month to resolve their dispute with Dalley. End Comment.

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